ECE Highlights

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Éditorial

Transports et environnement

La Conférence sur les transports et l'environnement s'est tenue à Vienne du 12 au 14 novembre 1997 à l'invitation du Gouvernement autrichien. Elle a montré une grande convergence de vues entre ministres des transports et ministres de l'environnement sur l'analyse de la situation. En un mot, les tendances actuelles conduisent à une impasse : congestion et pollution. L'accord sur le constat d'ensemble laisse ouverts les moyens pour prévenir les blocages annoncés et laisse la place à des nuances entre les pays. La Conférence a, certes, adopté des mesures contraignantes relatives au contrôle des camions et aux transports combinés, mais, surtout, elle a décidé d'un plan d'action qui appelle à une concertation et à des décisions sur nombre de problèmes délicats : rompre le lien entre croissance économique et croissance des échanges de marchandises, enrayer le déclin relatif du rail, internaliser les coûts et préserver la compétitivité de l'Europe, encourager les progrès techniques, aménager l'espace pour réduire la progression des besoins de transport... Enfin, la Conférence a demandé aux Bureaux du Comité des transports intérieurs et à celui des politiques de l'environnement d'assurer le suivi d'ensemble avec le concours des chefs de file pour les différents éléments du programme.

La CEE a, à l'occasion de cette conférence, prouvé sa pertinence. L'expérience accumulée et les instruments développés par les deux comités ont facilité l'identification des problèmes et des remèdes de court et long terme. Dans l'analyse comme, demain, dans la mise en œuvre des mesures, la CEE bénéficie des liens développés au cours des ans avec l'OCDE, la CERT, la Commission européenne, l'OIM et, bien sûr, de nombreuses organisations non gouvernementales des transports et de l'environnement. La dimension paneuropéenne de la Commission est adaptée au

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(For the English translation, see p. 12.)

Interview

UN/ECE: an ECOSOC entity that functions well!

Interview with
H.E. Mr. Vladimír Galuška,
Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the United Nations, Chairman of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

H.E. Mr. Vladimír Galuška

ECE Highlights: ***Did you know anything about the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE) before becoming Chairman of ECOSOC?***

Ambassador Vladimír Galuška: In Prague I was not dealing with international organizations as such and therefore I had scant knowledge of the various United Nations bodies. Of course I knew about the existence of the UN regional commissions as I had been a member of the Czech delegation to the United Nations back in 1993. But nothing in detail.

And now?

Now, I am much more familiar with them and especially with UN/ECE as my country is very much interested in what is done by the Commission. However, to tell you the truth, as Chairman of ECOSOC, it is very difficult to have an in-depth knowledge of each ECOSOC subsidiary body and UN/ECE is but one of them.

How would you evaluate the work of UN/ECE?

UN/ECE is certainly one of the ECOSOC entities which functions very well. It is undertaking very significant work in such areas as environment, transport, trade and economic analysis as well as statistics and for the countries in transition it is an indispensable component of the United Nations.

What is the future of regional commissions?

That depends! If the other regional commissions succeed in reforming themselves as UN/ECE has done, I think that they have a bright future. The in-depth reform which has been accomplished by UN/ECE is truly a model to be emulated by other Commissions and possibly other organizations of the United Nations system. In this period of financial constraint all Governments must ensure that the United Nations work is useful and avoids duplication with other organizations and institutions. It is my understanding that that is exactly what ECE member States agreed upon in April 1997. Furthermore, if the regional commissions succeed in enhancing cooperation between themselves and focus on selected activities their future will be even brighter.

What are the comparative advantages of the regional commissions?

Their main strength is that by virtue of being situated within a specific region they interact with their regional Governments to find mutually acceptable solutions to their specific regional priorities and problems. Moreover, they are successful because their member States cooperate on an equal footing, even the smaller countries have the same weight as the larger ones.

Has there been a change in the ECOSOC attitude *vis-à-vis* the regional commissions recently?

Indeed there has been a change: an increase in interest. Owing to the ongoing reform effort throughout the entire United Nations system, countries are looking at all ECOSOC subsidiary organs with added interest, in particular those bodies which they had up to now previously neglected and the regional commissions are among those bodies. UN/ECE has also drawn attention to itself as a result of presenting a report on its self-initiated and serious reform effort.

There was a suggestion that regional commissions should have their own voluntarily funded budget.

That would be a disadvantage for the member States of the regional commissions and would destroy their main *raison d'être*, namely to serve every country in an equal manner, despite their size or their economic wealth. If the budget were on a voluntary basis, some of the projects of interest to smaller countries or poorer countries might be neglected. For the countries in transition, that would be a setback.

For many years there have been proposals to revitalize ECOSOC. Has it worked?

ECOSOC is in the process of reforming its structure and functions. We are currently reviewing its subsidiary bodies. But in my opinion, ECOSOC's role is that of a coordinator. However, it has not always been successful in this undertaking. I think that the Secretary-General's suggestion that ECOSOC meet more frequently would help. However, this would imply more costs and Governments would be reluctant to endorse such a proposal given the Organization's current financial situation.

What are the basic problems of ECOSOC?

One basic problem with ECOSOC is that it is unwieldy and deals with too many questions. It has so many committees and commissions that we have problems contacting the chairpersons of these bodies. Last spring we tried to get in touch with some of them and, in several cases, nobody answered the faxes we sent. It took weeks just to gather information on what some of these bodies were doing. In my view, many of them should be abolished so that the energy can be channelled and focused on fewer activities, for example the regional economic commissions. However, progress in this respect is very slow and I am afraid that at the end of my term I will not be in a position to claim major achievements.

Should the United Nations get out of social and economic issues and leave them to specialized agencies?

The answer is very clear. No! The United Nations has an indispensable role to play in the field of social and economic development. As we can see throughout the world, development and peace go hand in hand. They are inseparable. ❑

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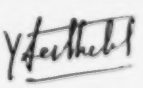
Transports et environnement

traitement d'un problème qui concerne tous les pays européens et dont la solution requiert la participation de tous. Enfin, le caractère multisectoriel de la Commission permet d'impliquer tous les acteurs concernés et donc de surmonter les obstacles qui naissent du manque de dialogue entre représentants d'intérêts différents.

En ce début d'année, je forme le vœu que la Commission soit pleinement utilisée pour son expertise, pour sa capacité à rassembler ses pays membres et pour sa capacité à traiter des questions multisectorielles. L'instrument est là. À chacun d'en tirer profit.



Yves BERTHELOT
5 janvier 1998

Green light for cooperation

Vienna hosted first get-together of transport and environment ministers

Mr. Yves Berthelot, UN/ECE Executive Secretary, at the lectern addressing the signing ceremony of the Protocol to the AGTC and the Agreement on Technical Inspections at the Vienna Rathaus.

Three hundred delegates from 40 European countries, the European Commission and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations took part in the first Regional Conference on Transport and the Environment organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe in cooperation with the Government of Austria in Vienna from 12 to 14 November 1997. "What makes this Conference so special is that transport ministers and environment ministers have met for the first time at the international level and come to the same conclusion: it cannot go on like this!", stressed Mr. Yves Berthelot, Executive Secretary of UN/ECE at the close of the Conference.

As one of the keynote speakers to the Conference pointed out, if present trends continue and there is no change in policy, freight transport will expand by 70 per cent in the European Union alone over the next 25 years. This transport will be mainly by road, increasing the market share of this mode of transport from the current 70 per cent to more than 80 per cent by 2010. If, moreover, the expected 40 per cent increase in car traffic also materializes, congestion and pollution will get completely out of hand. "There is an urgent need to decouple transport and economic growth, as was done with energy in the 1970s", emphasized Mr. Berthelot.

The Conference adopted a political Declaration and a Programme of Joint Action, which provide a comprehensive set of strategies and measures to cope with the environmental problems caused by transport. In all, 35 countries signed the political Declaration on Transport and the Environment.

The Declaration includes commitments related to: strategies to achieve sustainable transport; the protection of sensitive areas; the promotion of sustainable urban transport systems; the prevention of water pollution by vessels, including from loading and transshipment facilities, and the prevention of surface and groundwater pollution by all transport modes. Countries reaffirmed their commitment to these goals and agreed to cooperate within the UN/ECE framework to implement policy measures as set out in the Programme of Joint Action to take this work forward.

The Conference was also the occasion for a number of UN/ECE countries to sign two international legally binding instruments in the field of transport also aimed at improving their environmental performance. Twenty-two countries signed the Agreement concerning the Adoption of Uniform Conditions for Periodical Technical Inspections of Wheeled Vehicles and the Reciprocal Recognition of such Inspections. The Agreement, drawn up under the auspices of UN/ECE by government experts in close cooperation with non-governmental organizations representing the car manufacturing industry, the transport industry and the users, aims to create the uniform framework conditions for carrying out periodic technical inspections of road vehicles in use in all European countries.

All together 12 countries signed a Protocol on combined transport on inland waterways to the European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations (AGTC) of 1991. The objective of the Protocol, also prepared by a group of experts under the auspices of UN/ECE, is to emphasize the importance that European Governments give to the development of combined transport infrastructures and services on European inland waterways and coastal routes so as to promote the transfer of part of the road transport to those waterways and routes, thereby reducing the transport sector's environmental impact. The Protocol will also provide a multilateral legal framework for promoting the use of combined transport techniques (containers, swap-bodies, semi-trailers, trucks) on European inland waterways and coastal routes.

The Conference also endorsed draft amendments to the existing European Agreement of 1971 supplementing the 1968 Convention on Road Traffic. When entered into force, these amendments will have a significant impact on the environmental performance of heavy commercial vehicles in international traffic. Indeed, these vehicles will have to conform to the international requirements concerning pollutant emissions and noise in force at the time of their manufacture and in addition will have to be in good order, i.e. to undergo technical inspections concerning those pollutant emissions and noise once a year.

"The UN/ECE Conference on Transport and the Environment has been a success not only because of the signing of important documents, or the number of delegates who attended, but mainly because there was a genuine willingness on all sides to start working together. The time of environment and transport people having contradictory and seemingly irreconcilable interests is over", concluded Mr. Berthelot. "During these three days in Vienna a process has been set in motion and nothing will be able to stop it, because it is a necessity perceived by people and politicians to reconcile transport and environment." ☐

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Protocol on volatile organic compounds in force

A new instrument to combat toxic air pollutants and precursors of photochemical pollution

A new Protocol to the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution entered into force on 29 September 1997. The Protocol aims to curb the emissions of volatile VOCs, mainly hydrocarbons, and their transboundary fluxes. It is the fifth in a series of specific international agreements on air pollution negotiated within the framework of UN/ECE to combat air pollution in the region. The VOC Protocol was initially signed by 21 parties to the Convention, and it has now been ratified by 16, the exact number required for it to come into effect.

By ratifying the Protocol concerning the Control of Emissions of Volatile Organic Compounds or their Transboundary Fluxes, the parties are committed to reducing their national VOC emissions by 30 per cent between 1988 and 1999 or within "specified ozone-management areas (TOMAs)", i.e. areas within countries where particularly intensive activities causing VOC emissions take place. A few parties have chosen to apply an alternative option of the Protocol and freeze their VOC emissions by the year 1999.

New sulphur protocol will save US$ 9.5 billion a year

"According to estimates by experts at Imperial College, London, the new UN/ECE Sulphur Protocol will save US$ 9.5 billion a year in Europe alone by reducing damage to buildings. This is an opportunity countries cannot afford to miss", says Lars Nordberg, Deputy Director of the Environment and Human Settlements Division of UN/ECE.

A recent study submitted to the UN/ECE Working Group on Effects and published by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, is based on empirical data gathered throughout the region. These cost data relate only to damage to buildings that the Protocol would prevent, they do not include the Protocol's positive impact on, for instance, human health or the environment as a whole, which would generate far bigger savings than those already assessed. From this study it is also clear that the savings in eastern Europe are considerably greater than those in western Europe. Poland, eastern

Germany, and the Czech Republic, which together encompass the "Black Triangle", as well as Slovakia and Ukraine would benefit in particular.

The new Sulphur Protocol to the UN/ECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution needs 16 ratifications to enter into force. It has already been ratified by 10 countries and six others have indicated that they would ratify it very soon. The Protocol, is therefore, expected to enter into force in early 1998.

Round Table on Pesticides: Use and misuse, benefits and hazards—Where do we go from here?

Pesticides are organic chemicals that are widely used in agriculture, gardening and forestry. Although they help to control pests and, hence, safeguard the productivity of food, cotton, timber and other crops, many of them pose serious health risks, both to those who handle and mishandle them and to the millions of people who are exposed to pesticide residue in agricultural produce, drinking water or seafood. Some widely used pesticides are persistent in nature, or bioaccumulate and biomagnify in fatty tissues and, therefore, pose a particular threat. Chemicals combining these properties are known as persistent organic pollutants or POPs. Due to the persistence of some pesticides and their long-range transport through air and water, the problem takes on a global dimension.

To address these issues, a round-table discussion on the use and misuse of pesticides was held in connection with the fourth session of the UN/ECE Committee on Environment Policy in May 1997. The panellists addressed the short-term benefits of pesticides as well as their long-term risks and the major policy implications for agriculture and national health programmes. The round table also addressed the current situation of countries with economies in transition and assessed the needs for assistance to ensure a safer use and management of pesticides and the safe disposal of stockpiles. ❑

European Waters

Ten countries sign UN/ECE Agreement on European inland waterway network

On 23 June 1997, in Helsinki, Ministers of Transport of Croatia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia and Switzerland signed a European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance (AGN) that fosters the development in Europe of a coherent inland waterway network. Luxembourg had signed the Agreement earlier that year. This legal instrument establishes the internationally agreed European network of inland waterways and ports as well as the uniform infrastructure and operational parameters to which they should conform. The geographical scope of the network of E-waterways consisting of navigable rivers, canals and coastal routes extends from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural mountains connecting 37 countries and reaching beyond the European region. For the first time, standard dimensions for all vessels are spelled out in the instrument of a binding character. By acceding to the AGN, Governments will commit themselves to the

development and construction of their inland waterways and ports of international importance in accordance with the uniform conditions agreed upon and within the relevant investment programmes. The AGN Agreement is also open for accession by UN/ECE member States. It complements the set of already existing European Agreements establishing the road (AGR), rail (AGC) and the combined transport (AGTC) networks. ❑

Managing transboundary waters in Europe

All over the world, in developed as well as in developing countries, people are making more and more use of the available quantities of fresh water: for drinking, for washing and cleaning, for industrial processes and cooling, for recreation, navigation and irrigation. As the majority of rivers flow from one country to another, people downstream depend on what happens upstream. Consequently, international cooperation is necessary to achieve sound transboundary water management.

This is the reason why 160 representatives of more than 25 countries and international organizations gathered at Mrzezyno in Poland to participate in the International Conference on Management of Transboundary Waters in Europe. Under the patronage of the Polish Ministry of Environmental Protection, Natural Resources and Forestry, this Conference was organized by the Regional Water Management Board, the Voivodeship Inspectorate of Environmental Protection in Szczecin and the Szczecin Economic Information Bureau. It was supported by the International Commission for Protection of the Oder and the secretariat of the UN/ECE Con-

vention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. The Conference stressed that environmental issues cannot be dealt with in isolation from other social developments. Agriculture, industrial activities, and transport all have an impact on the environment. The common will to cooperate and resolve existing problems through negotiation was reaffirmed at the Conference. Participants underlined the importance of avoiding one-sided promotion of individual, sectoral or national interests. The Conference also gave guidance on transboundary monitoring and alarm systems, which provide information on the quality of water and discharges to those who are involved in crisis management. The hope is that regular publication of monitoring results will also help to raise public awareness.

A UN/ECE Convention at work—Belarus, Poland and Ukraine pledge to protect the river Bug

Belarus, Poland and Ukraine have just concluded a historic multilateral agreement at the United Nations Office at Geneva, vowing to work together to protect the river Bug, which is increasingly threatened by pollution. The Bug marks the border between Poland and Ukraine and between Poland and Belarus. Its water reserves are particularly important to the 2.5 million people who live in its catchment area. In recent years, however, both the upper and the lower reaches of the Bug have been affected by pollution resulting from industrial wastes and agricultural pesticide and herbicide pollution.

The riparian countries are concerned that the Bug's water resources will soon come under so much pressure that the needs of the water users can no longer be met. In an effort to avert such a disaster, Belarus, Poland and Ukraine have decided to implement the guidelines on water-quality monitoring and assessment of transboundary rivers drawn up within the framework of the UN/ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, which came into force on 1 October 1996. It is the first time that the three countries have agreed to work on a multilateral basis. As a result of this agreement they will harmonize their methodologies for drawing up inventories of the abstraction and use of water resources. They will also jointly monitor the volumes of waste water discharged into the Bug and assess the amounts of pollution from point source and from diffuse sources.

Industrial risks in countries in transition UN/ECE tackles problem head-on

A number of accidents have recently taken place at industrial plants in countries in central and eastern Europe resulting in risks for the countries concerned and their neighbours. To allay fears about this situation, UN/ECE is setting up a monitoring system within the framework of its Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents. Teams of experts will systematically check industrial installations that pose risks to people or to the environment. They will verify compliance with international safety norms to protect both the workers and the local residents, regardless of whether they live in the countries of the plant or across the border. By setting up international expert teams to ensure better safety for all, UN/ECE wants to tackle the problem head-on. The teams, which will operate in connection with the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, are an innovative way for some member States to express their support for this Convention and to apply it even before it comes into force.

Follow-up to an environmental performance review—Estonia takes up the challenge

When UN/ECE reviewed Estonia's environmental performance, it concluded that the pollution load had dropped considerably since the beginning of the transition process. However, the environmental improvements had to a large extent been achieved as a result of the economic slowdown. The UN/ECE review drew up recommendations to help Estonia consolidate its environmental achievements. Since the Environmental Performance Review was published in 1996, Estonia has taken up the challenge and followed up with some strategic measures. It has adopted a series of environmental laws and broadened the scope of its economic instruments. "The fact that Estonia is striving to meet these goals will ultimately help it on the road to full European integration", says Kaj Bärlund, Director of the UN/ECE Division of Environment and Human Settlements. "Its efforts also highlight the usefulness of the UN/ECE's Environmental Performance Reviews and the willingness on the part of the countries reviewed to follow up their recommendations."

Actions speak louder than words for Rio commitments

"The Rio Conference on Environment and Development proved an outstanding success in terms of raising public awareness worldwide, but five years on it is disappointing to see how few of the good intentions have been put into action", says Kaj Bärlund, Director of the UN/ECE Environment and Human Settlements Division.

"The Rio Conference triggered a vast array of projects and activities and many of these will undoubtedly have a long-lasting impact, but five years later it seems that very few concrete results can be attributed directly to the Rio process. All in all, we now need some innovative action to keep the momentum going in the Rio follow-up."

According to Mr. Bärlund, there is a need for more transparency in assessing the progress made by countries in meeting the objectives of Agenda 21. At the moment countries do report to the Commission on Sustainable Development. This country reporting is useful, but it is possible to go even further, especially on a regional level. To add value to this reporting process, UN/ECE has proposed to take responsibility for assessing the national reports to see to what extent its member countries have fulfilled their obligations.

UN/ECE's experience with Environmental Performance Reviews shows that its member countries are willing to accept such outside assessment. This could open a new form of dialogue between the countries in the region and help in disseminating experiences. ☐

UN/CEFACT—Ready for Business

With the establishment of its Centre for the Facilitation of Procedures and Practices for Administration, Commerce and Trade (CEFACT), UN/ECE has inaugurated an innovative reform showing how United Nations bodies can reorganize their work to leverage collaborative efforts, work more effectively with the private sector and delegate technical decisions to field experts. The strategic objective of CEFACT is to support international commerce, transport and administration in the simplification of their business processes and procedures.

For over thirty years, the UN/ECE Working Party on the Facilitation of International Trade Procedures (WP.4) has developed trade facilitation techniques, recommendations and norms which have been implemented in governmental and commercial sectors across the world. In response to new technological developments, WP.4 launched a re-engineering exercise over two years ago. This exercise resulted in the transformation of WP.4 into the Centre for Facilitation of Procedures and Practices for Administration, Commerce and Transport (CEFACT) which was unanimously approved by the Commission on 7 February 1997. The new Centre is dedicated to facilitating international transactions through the development of recommendations and tools that simplify and harmonize procedures and information flows. Its ultimate objective is to improve the ability of business, trade and administrative organizations to exchange products and relevant services effectively, thus contributing to the growth of global commerce. Within the new Centre, work has been reorganized in order to streamline decision-making, leverage collaborative efforts and delegate technical decisions to informal technical groups. CEFACT's permanent working groups will cover business analysis; international trade procedures, legal aspects; international codes; techniques and methodologies; and electronic commerce policy.

The unique position of CEFACT is illustrated by the worldwide, active participation in its work by governments, business and trade representatives from the ECE region and other United Nations Member States as well as by other intergovernmental organizations. To reinforce this, the Centre has also established a network of partnerships between its secretariat, UN/ECE, and the other United Nations regional commissions. Special representatives to CEFACT have been appointed for the Commissions for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and Western Asia (ESCWA).

Forum on the Prospects for Promoting Foreign Direct Investment in the Transition Economies—29 to 30 September 1997

A Forum on the Prospects for Promoting Foreign Direct Investment in the Transition Economies was organized at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on 29 and 30 September 1997 by UN/ECE in conjunction with the Foreign Investment Advisory Service (FIAS) of the World Bank. The purpose of the Forum was to identify benchmarks of best practices in investment promotion which can help policy makers in the countries of central and eastern Europe and the CIS in raising standards and improving the services provided to foreign investors. Participants from the private sector, World Bank and UN/ECE spoke on such issues as the role of investment promotion agencies (IPAs); how to attract investment into infrastructure; marketing the country to foreign investors; and security, crime and corruption concerns of foreign investors. A special working group composed of business and government representatives was established during the forum and reported to the plenary at the final session on critical questions of service expectations and the development of effective partnerships between investment promotion agencies and the private sector. ❑

TIR Convention

Revised TIR customs transit procedure adopted

The TIR Administrative Committee, meeting in Geneva on 27 June 1997, decided to fundamentally revise the TIR regime. Like other customs transit regimes, the TIR regime is facing considerable difficulties as a result of the activities of intentional organized crime which abuses the facilities provided by the TIR Convention. Therefore, the 60 States represented in the TIR Administrative Committee agreed unanimously to provide the TIR regime with a new intergovernmental structure to better coordinate the activities of the national Governments in this field. The newly established TIR Executive Board (TIRExB) will monitor national administrative practices in the application of the TIR regime and will supervise the activities for the administration of the TIR Carnet system, currently under the responsibility of the International Road Transport Union (IRU). The Administrative Committee also decided to limit access to the TIR regime only to honest transport operators who must be approved by their national transport associations and by customs authorities. Furthermore, strict reliability criteria for national associations authorized to issue TIR Carnets have been approved. The TIR Administrative Committee also decided to legalize the IRU SAFETIR system, providing on-line control for each of the more than 8,000 TIR transport operations carried out per day and to lend support for a further improvement of the present EDI system, in close cooperation with the IRU.

The TIR customs transit procedure, based on the United Nations TIR Convention of 1975, provides wide-ranging facilities for international goods transported by road. It allows for unhindered goods transport under customs seal, based on an international guarantee, from Norway to Iran and from Portugal to Kazakstan with only minimal customs control at the borders. ❑

Specialists meet to discuss collaboration at a UN/ECE seminar on the changing role of research institutions in the chemical industry

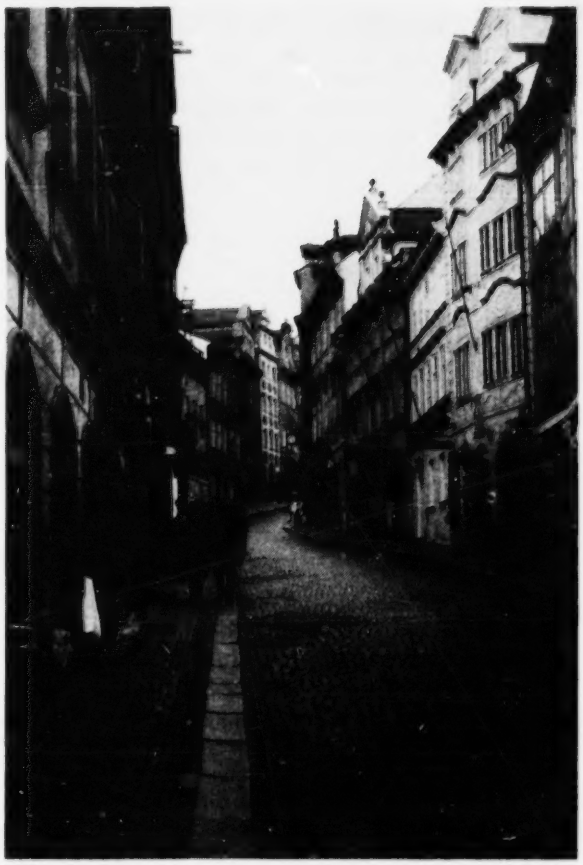
Two recent developments in Europe's changing chemical industry have had profound effects on how and where chemical research and development (R & D) will soon be carried out. The first is the opening up to private sector contracting of the numerous R & D institutes in central and eastern Europe which were formerly under State control. The other major development is the restructuring of many large multinational chemical firms, placing corporate emphasis on core activities and eliminating considerable R & D activity in areas of less direct corporate interest. However, some questions arise concerning this R & D activity: who is going to finance it and how is it going to be coordinated?

Taking advantage of its unique position of having a 55 country membership, UN/ECE organized a seminar jointly with the Government of Poland to address these and related issues. The seminar, entitled the Changing Role of Research Institutions in the Chemical Industry, was held at Warsaw, Poland, from 9 to 11 October 1997. It presented to western corporate research directors the capabilities of different types of research institutions. It will examine the developing trends in the awarding of outside-contract research to universities and research institutes in both eastern and western Europe and will discuss such aspects as financing, confidentiality, application of R & D results and joint venturing in the R & D institution arena. ❑

UN/ECE launches an initiative to promote real estate in central and eastern Europe and the CIS

Commercial and residential real estate markets are not fully functioning in the countries of central and eastern Europe and the CIS and this is holding back economic development in the region. For this reason, UN/ECE decided to launch a new initiative—a UN/ECE Real Estate Advisory Group consisting of private sector experts from banks and international real estate enterprises as well as senior real property lawyers. The Chairman of the Real Estate Advisory Group (RE-AG) is Mr. Robert Hall, Senior Partner with Baker & McKenzie, London, United Kingdom. Speaking at the inaugural meeting of the Group at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Mr. Hall outlined the mission of the Group and the benefits that will flow to transition economies when land is better secured in financial transactions.

"The purpose of the Group", he said, "will be to advise and persuade authorities that property can be used to excellent effect without damage to the environment and to society. It will offer Governments advice on many of the technical and legal issues related to this activity".



The work is being coordinated with EBRD, the World Bank and the European Union. It is a joint activity of the Meeting of Land Administration Officials and the UN/ECE Working Party on International Contract Practices in Industry (W.P.5), under whose aegis RE-AG will operate.

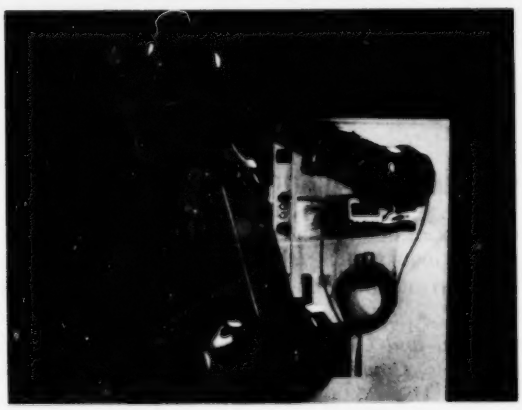
Economic Bulletin for Europe 1997 (Vol. 49)

In the latest issue of its *Economic Bulletin for Europe* UN/ECE discusses recent economic developments in the western market economies and in the transition economies of central and eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Chapter 1 reviews the principal macroeconomic developments in the world economy, Europe (east and west), North America and in the CIS in 1997 and discusses some of the possible effects of global financial turmoil, especially on the transition economies. Chapter 2 reviews recent developments in the international trade of eastern Europe, the Baltic States and the CIS, including their mutual trade, and chapter 3 does the same for current account balances and external financial developments. Chapter 4 surveys the surge in capital inflows into eastern Europe between 1990 and 1996 and discusses the dilemmas and problems they pose for macroeconomic policy, and the responses of the monetary authorities. Finally, the *Bulletin* contains an extensive Statistical Appendix containing, *inter alia*, key macroeconomic series for all the transition economies for the period 1982 to 1996.

Economic Bulletin for Europe 1997 (Vol. 49), Sales No. E.97.II.E.23, US$ 55.

1996 marked the second consecutive year of double digit growth in world robot investment

According to the UN/ECE publication *World Industrial Robots 1997—Statistics, Analysis and Forecasts to 2000*, in 1995 worldwide sales of industrial robots surged by almost 29 per cent and in 1996 global sales increased by 11 per cent, reaching about 80,500 units, or more or less the same level as the record year of 1990. Total accumulated yearly sales since industrial roots started to be introduced in industry at the end of the 1960s, amounted at the end of 1996 to some 860,000 units. Many of the early robots have, however, by now been taken out of service. The stock of industrial robots in actual operation is therefore lower. UN/ECE and the International Federation of Robotics (IFR) estimate the total worldwide stock of operational industrial robots at the end of 1996 at just under 680,000 units compared with about 640,000 units at the end of 1995, representing an increase of 6 per cent over 1995.



Forecasts 1997-2000

After two years of booming robot demand, the market in 1997 is projected to increase by just 4 per cent, largely as a result of sharp falls in the market in Germany and a slow-down in the growth in Japan, France and the United Kingdom. In the United States, on the other hand, growth will pick up again after the temporary halt in 1996. It is projected that growth in 1997 will reach at least 10 per cent over 1996. Europe other than the foresaid countries and Asia will also be buoyant markets. For the period 1998-2000, worldwide growth is expected to reach a yearly average of just over 15 per cent. This implies that sales will increase from just over 80,500 units in 1996 to about 131,000 units in the year 2000.

World Industrial Robots 1997—Statistics, Analysis and Forecasts to 2000, Sales No. GV.E.97.0.20, US$ 120.

UN/ECE assesses the housing sector in Bulgaria

Bulgaria is a nation of home-owners, yet new housing construction has virtually come to a halt. In 1980, almost 75,000 new homes were built in Bulgaria. However, in the 1980s construction activity started to decline, and by 1994 the annual increase in new homes had dwindled to 8,700. These are some of the findings just published by UN/ECE in *Country Profiles on the Housing Sector, Bulgaria.* This report is the first in a series of country reports which examines the trends in the housing sector in countries in transition and puts forward recommendations. According to the ECE report, in Bulgaria the lack of suitable financial institutions, such as building societies, and of affordable mortgages, as well as the sharp drop in the population's purchasing power, explain the collapse of private investment in housing. The report, consequently, recommends that the present mortgage system should be made more accessible and suggests that local and central governments should share authority and responsibility for housing.

Investment in housing in some central and east European countries

(as percentage of total investment)

Country	*1980*	*1991*	*1993*
Bulgaria	13.0	8.7	5.0
Hungary	17.8	22.3	14.8
Poland	20.9	27.8	22.2
Romania	9.3	10.1	5.9

SOURCE: *Annual Bulletin of Housing and Building Statistics for Europe and North America*, 1995, UN/ECE.

Country Profiles on the Housing Sector, Bulgaria, UN Sales No. E.96.II.E.28 (English) or R.96.II.E.28 (Russian). US$ 25. ❑

Industrial strides in the steel industry

New steel-making capacity growing faster than expected

The 45th UN/ECE annual review of the steel market, *The Steel Market in 1996 and Prospects for 1997*, focuses on rising new crude steel-making capacity, particularly in North America and Asia. According to the review, the world steel market sees itself threatened by possible oversupply in the short term and overcapacity build-up in the medium term. One year ago, ECE had already warned of a potential overcapacity build-up in the period from 1995/1996 to 1999. The latest ECE analysis points to a large expansion of total new crude steel-making capacity in North America and Asia for the same period—a 12 Mt. increase to 87.7 Mt. Although in North America expansion predictions remain unchanged from last year's 17.4 Mt., new capacity in Asia will expand to 70.3 Mt., with Malaysia, Thailand and Taiwan Province of China showing particularly strong growth. New electric arc furnace (EAF) capacity is expected to reach as much as 60.3 Mt. out of the 87.7 Mt., in contrast to last year's prediction of 54.1 Mt. In addition, the world steel industry is worried about the massive overcapacity in the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

The Steel Market in 1996 and Prospects for 1997, Sales No.E.97.II.E.13, US$ 125.

Use of scrap substitutes in the iron and steel industry forecast to almost double by the year 2000

The UN/ECE Iron and Steel Scrap review foresees no shortage of ferrous supplies at the global level because of the increasing scrap supply from "old" industrialized countries and increasing amounts of scrap substitutes. The total amount of scrap substitutes is estimated at 40 million tonnes in 1996, reaching a possible 60 to 75 million tonnes by the year 2000. Such estimates dissipate any fear of a scrap shortage. *Iron and Steel Scrap* shows that there is now a world scrap market and that the level of prices is more or less the same at any given time in all the industrialized countries. In developing countries, however, where scrap is to be imported over long distances, transportation costs raise the price levels. There is thus a strong incentive to produce scrap substitutes or even to return to the conventional iron and steel plant concept, as is happening in a number of Asian countries. The review deals with steel production, scrap supply, demand, trade, prices and substitutes, country commentaries and future trends, based on the evolution which took place between the years 1980 and 1996. It also provides the total scrap balance in tabular form for each of the 51 major steel-producing countries for the period 1980-1996 and contains 27 tables covering scrap production, consumption by manufacturing processes, requirements and trade.

The 1997 Iron and Steel Scrap Review, Sales No. E.97.II.E.15, US$ 60.00.

Foreign investment opportunities in chemicals in central and eastern Europe

UN/ECE has just published a study on *Structural and Ownership Changes in the Chemical Industry of Countries in Transition*. The study provides valuable background data for understanding the opportunities in the chemical industry of these countries—whether as customers, suppliers, alliance partners or for investment. It describes in detail the chemical industry in nearly 20 countries in central and eastern Europe and outlines the general industrial development and the legal framework for privatization and foreign investment in each country.

Structural and Ownership Changes in the Chemical Industry of Countries in Transition, Sales No. E.97.II.E.17, US$ 75.00. ❑

Chemical industry now accounts for 10 per cent of total world trade: chemical trade doubles in six years

World trade in chemicals and chemical products amounted to some US$ 450 billion in 1995, roughly 10 per cent of total trade in all commodities. This value is double that of six years earlier, from around US$ 230 in 1989, yielding an annual average growth rate of 11-12 per cent. The leading 22 importing and exporting countries represent a very important but slowly decreasing fraction of that total, as newer competing countries enter chemical trading. Western Europe accounts for more than half of world imports in chemicals and nearly two thirds of world exports. North America imports half as much as Asia but exports similar amounts. These and numerous other conclusions can be drawn from the latest edition of the *Annual Bulletin of Trade in Chemical Products*, published by UN/ECE. The 470 page publication gives detailed 1995 import and export trade data for 85 chemicals and chemical products in value terms and 22 in tonnages. The data are based on statistics reported to UN/ECE by the leading 22 producing and consuming countries trading with 60 partner countries worldwide. Since the *Bulletin* is published annually, time series can be derived from any product or group of products by reference to earlier editions.

Annual Bulletin of Trade in Chemical Products, Sales No. E/F/R.97.II.E.12, US$ 47.00.

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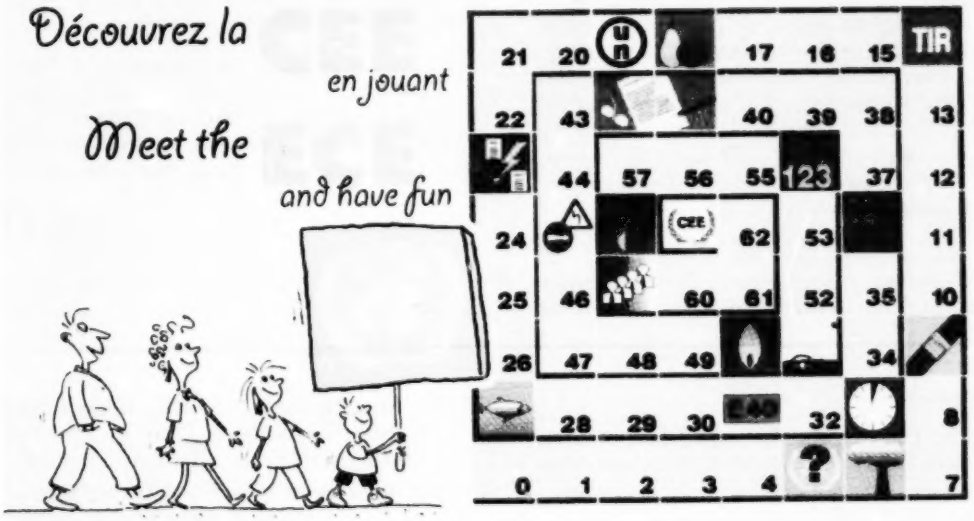

ECE Calendar

1998

January

12-16 INLAND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

13-16 Meeting of Experts on Pollution and Energy

19-21 Working Party on the Transport of Dangerous Goods—Special Session on ADN

19-23 Working Group on Strategies

27-28 Working Party on Gas

28-29 Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians

February

2-6 Meeting of Experts on Brakes and Running Gear

9-12 Meeting of Experts on the Standardization of Seed Potatoes

(Continued on next page.)

Editorial

Transport and Environment

The Conference on Transport and the Environment was held at Vienna from 12 to 14 November 1997 at the invitation of the Austrian Government. At the meeting there was a wide convergence of views among Ministers of Transport and Ministers of the Environment concerning the analysis of the situation. In a word, present trends have led to a stalemate: congestion and pollution. Agreement reached on the general state of the situation leaves open the means for averting acknowledged problems and for accommodating differences between countries. Of course, the Conference adopted regulatory measures for lorries and combined transport, but above all it decided upon a Programme of Joint Action which calls for dialogue and decisions on a number of sensitive areas: to sever the link between economic growth and the demand for transport due to growth in trade, to check the relative decline in rail transport, to internalize costs and preserve European competitiveness, to encourage technical progress, and to develop sustainable transport systems. Finally, the Conference invited the Bureaux of the Inland Transport Committee and the Committee on Environmental Policy to assure the follow-up of the agreements reached with the support of the focal points responsible for the different programme elements.

On the occasion of the Conference, the UN/ECE proved its relevance. The experience acquired and the legal instruments elaborated by the two ECE Committees facilitated the identification of problems, and solutions to them, in the medium and long term. In preparing the Conference, the UN/ECE benefited from the links developed over the years with OECD, the Conference of European Transport Ministers, the European Commission, the International Maritime Organization and of course numerous non-governmental organizations. It will continue to benefit from this collaboration in the follow-up to the adopted agreements.

The Commission's pan-European scope proved to be appropriate for the treatment of a problem which concerns all European countries and whose solution requires the participation of each one. Furthermore, the Commission's multisectoral character allows for the involvement of all actors concerned and thus facilitates overcoming problems which are born of a lack of dialogue between delegations with different interests.

At the beginning of this new year, I wish that the Commission be fully used for its expertise, for its ability to bring together its member countries and for its capacity to deal with multisectoral issues. The instrument is there. Everyone can benefit from it.

Yves BERTHELOT
5 January 1998

ECE Calendar (*Continued*)

17-19 Working Party on the Standardization of Technical and Safety Requirements in Inland Navigation

23-27 Working Party on Customs Questions Affecting Transport

March

9-13 Meeting of Experts on Coordination of Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

10-13 Working Party on the Construction of Vehicles

16-18 COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY—Special Session

16-20 Centre for Facilitation of Procedures and Practices for Administration, Commerce and Transport (CEFACT)

23-27 Joint Meeting of the RID Safety Committee and the ECE Working Party on the Transport of Dangerous Goods (Bern, Switzerland)

24-27 Working Party on Road Traffic Safety

WHERE TO ORDER

The publications listed with sales prices may be ordered from: **United Nations Bookshop, Sales Unit, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland** and a number of bookstores in the ECE region. Send cheque or money order in US$ made payable to: UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATIONS.

Those publications listed without a sales price may be obtained from the Information Officer, Economic Commission for Europe, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland.

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